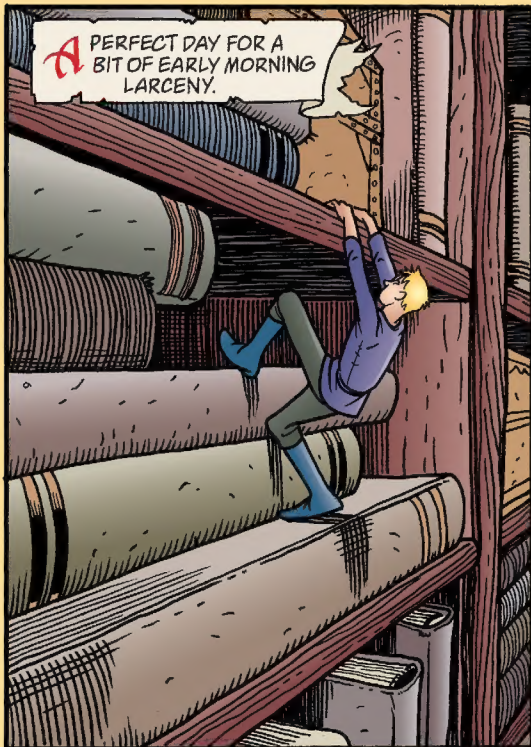
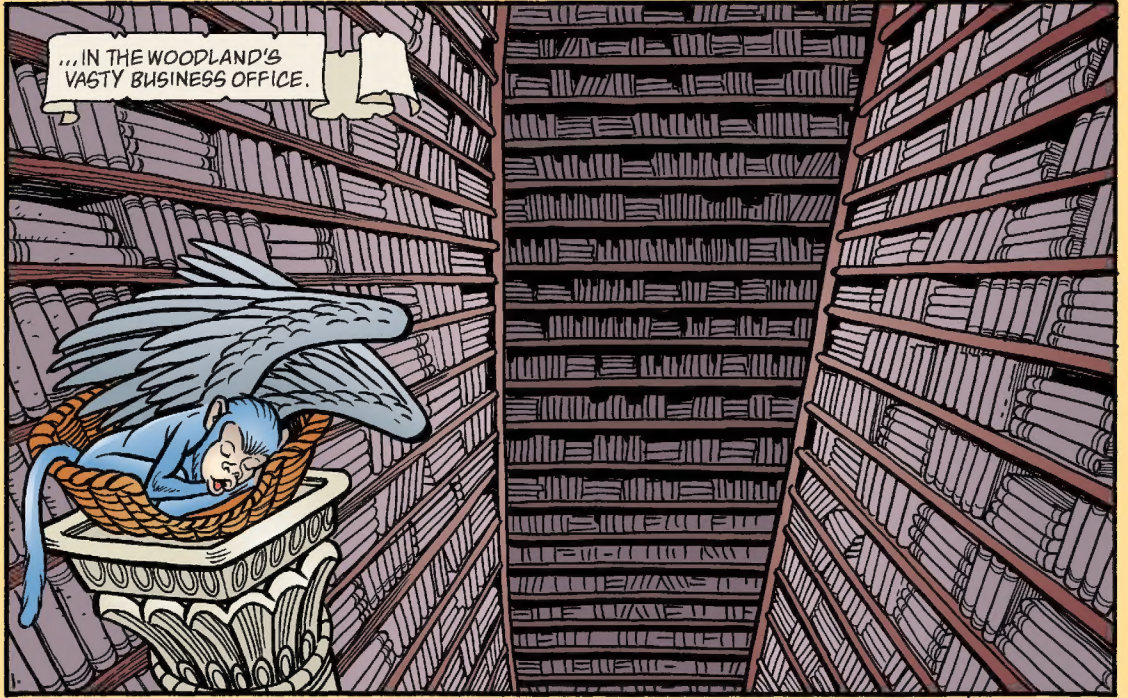


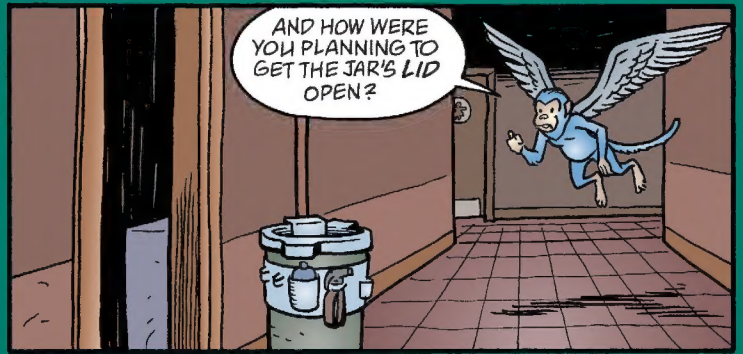
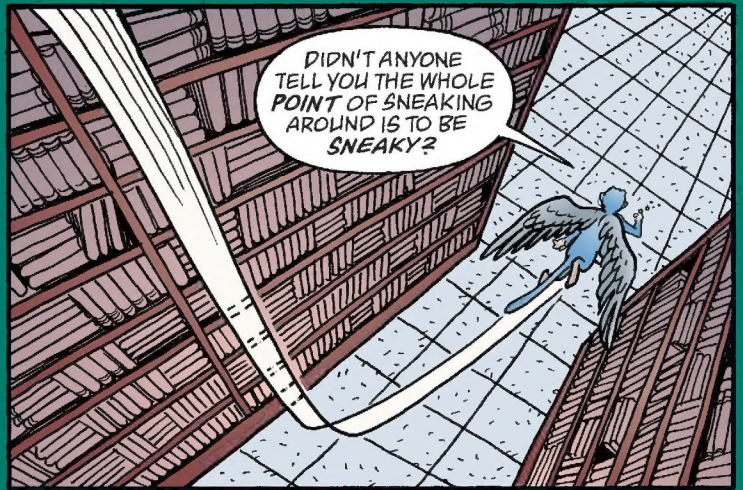
# FABLES

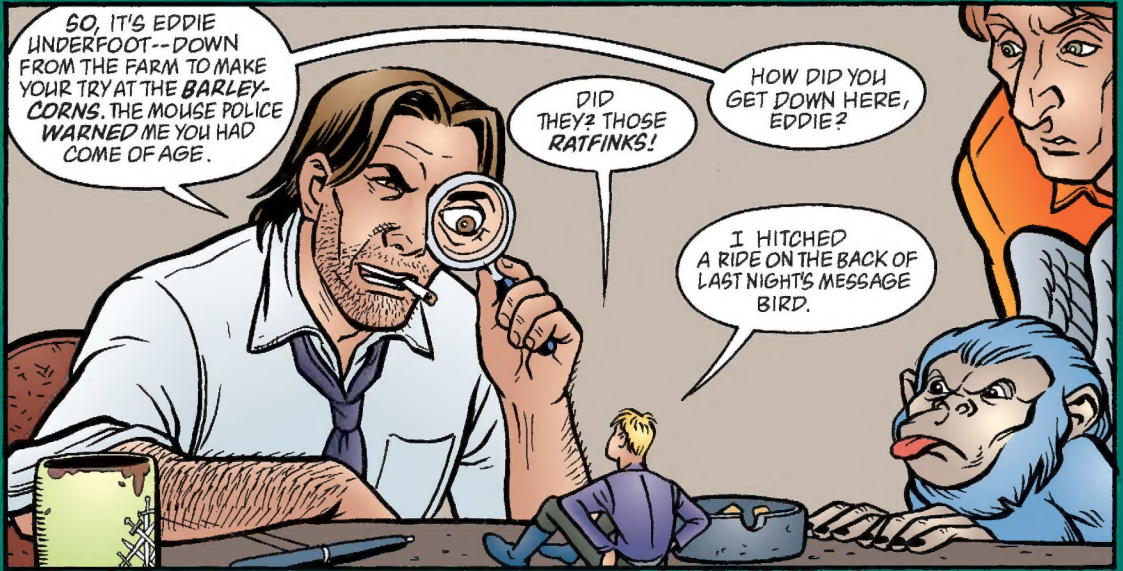
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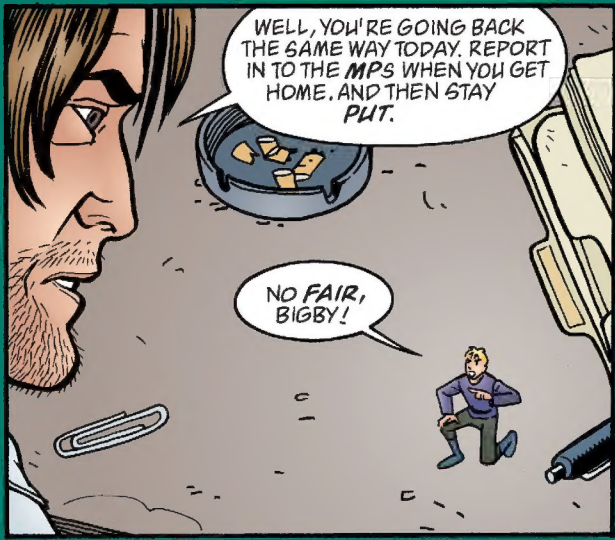


SO, IT'S EDDIE UNDERFOOT--DOWN FROM THE FARM TO MAKE YOUR TRY AT THE BARLEY-CORNS. THE MOUSE POLICE WARNED ME YOU HAD COME OF AGE.

DID THEY? THOSE RATFINKS!

HOW DID YOU GET DOWN HERE, EDDIE?

I HITCHED A RIDE ON THE BACK OF LAST NIGHT'S MESSAGE BIRD.



WELL, YOU'RE GOING BACK THE SAME WAY TODAY. REPORT IN TO THE MPS WHEN YOU GET HOME. AND THEN STAY PUT.

NO FAIR, BIGBY!



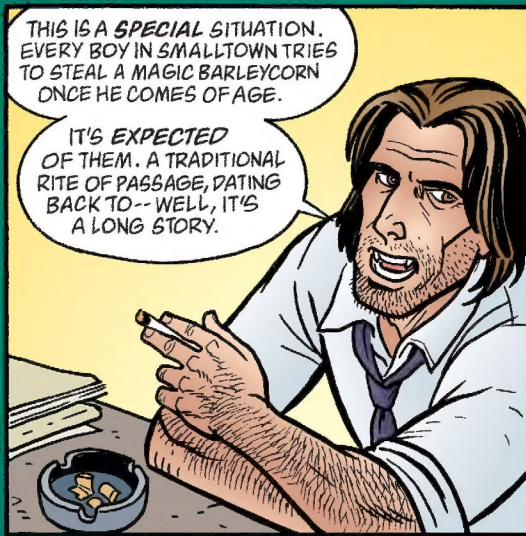
YOU'VE HAD YOUR ONE SHOT AT FAME AND GLORY, JUST LIKE YOUR OLD MAN, WHEN HE TURNED EIGHTEEN. AND HIS DAD BEFORE HIM.


TRY IT AGAIN AND I'LL HAVE TO CHARGE YOU--OFFICIALLY.



GET HIM OUT OF HERE, BUFKIN. MAKE SURE HE GOES HOME TODAY.

ROGER DODGER, OLD COPGER!





"LONG AGO, IN THE HOMELANDS, WHEN MOST PEOPLE STILL BELIEVED THEY HAD A CHANCE TO DEFEAT THE ADVERSARY'S INVADING ARMIES, THE KINGDOM OF LILLIPUT WAS AMONG THOSE DETERMINED TO DO THEIR PART.

"SO, THEY MUSTERED UP A VOLUNTEER REGIMENT-- DUBBED IT THE FIRST LILLIPUTIAN EXPEDITIONARY AND LIBERATION FORCE-- AND MARCHED THEM OFF, AMIDST APPROPRIATE POMP AND FANFARE, TO AID IN THE WAR EFFORT."

BE CAREFUL!

BE SURE TO CHANGE YOUR SOCKS EVERY DAY! AND STAY AWAY FROM FOREIGN GIRLS!

MAKE US PROUD, SON!

# BARLEYCORN BRIDES

Bill Willingham: **writer-creator**    Todd Klein: **letters**    James Jean: **cover art**  
Linda Medley: **artist**    Daniel Vozzo: **color and seps**    Mariah Huehner: **asst. ed.**  
Shelly Bond: **editor**



"BRAVELY, THEY CROSSED THE WIDE, WILD SEAS, TO DISTANT LANDS THEY'D NEVER BEFORE VISITED."

LAND HO!



"ONLY TO BE GREETED WITH QUITE A SURPRISE ON THEIR ARRIVAL."

OD'S BLOOD!

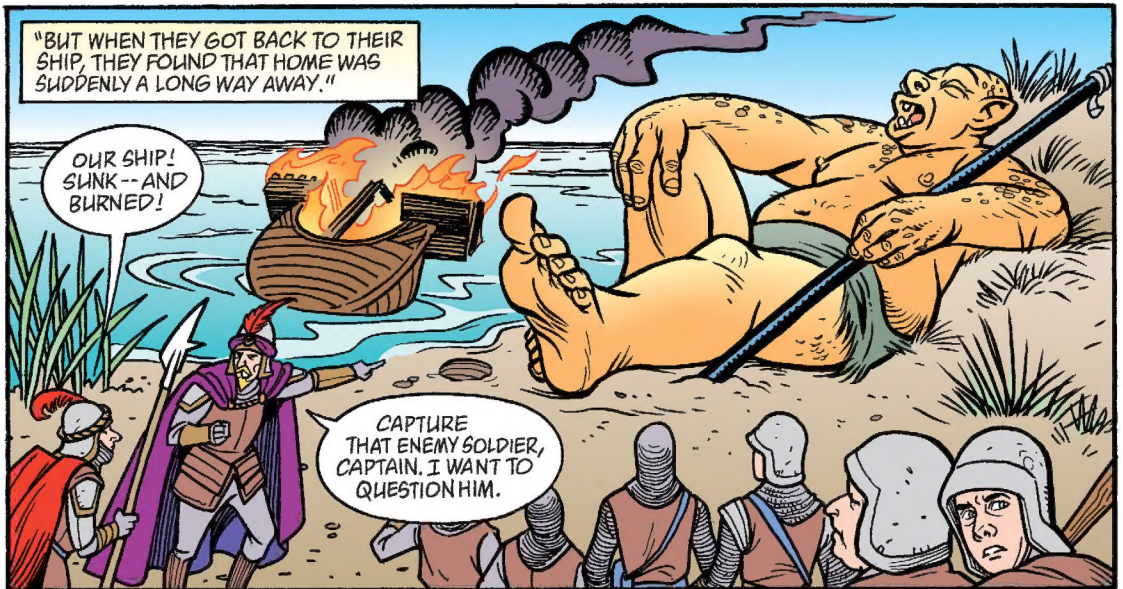
THIS IS A LAND OF GIANTS!



"A HURRIED MEETING OF THEIR OFFICERS WAS CALLED."

ONE SINGLE SOLDIER IN THIS LAND COULD SQUISH THE LOT OF US UNDER HIS BOOT.

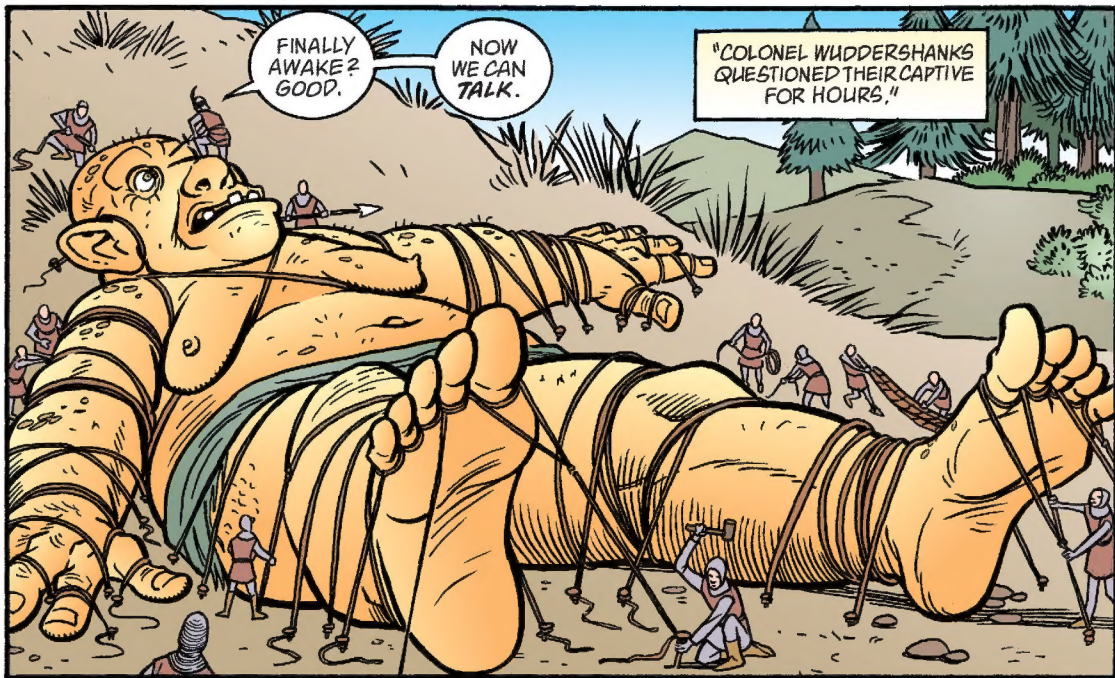
WE CAN'T HELP HERE. TURN THE TROOPS AROUND, CAPTAIN. WE'RE GOING HOME.



"BUT WHEN THEY GOT BACK TO THEIR SHIP, THEY FOUND THAT HOME WAS SUDDENLY A LONG WAY AWAY."

OUR SHIP! SUNK -- AND BURNED!

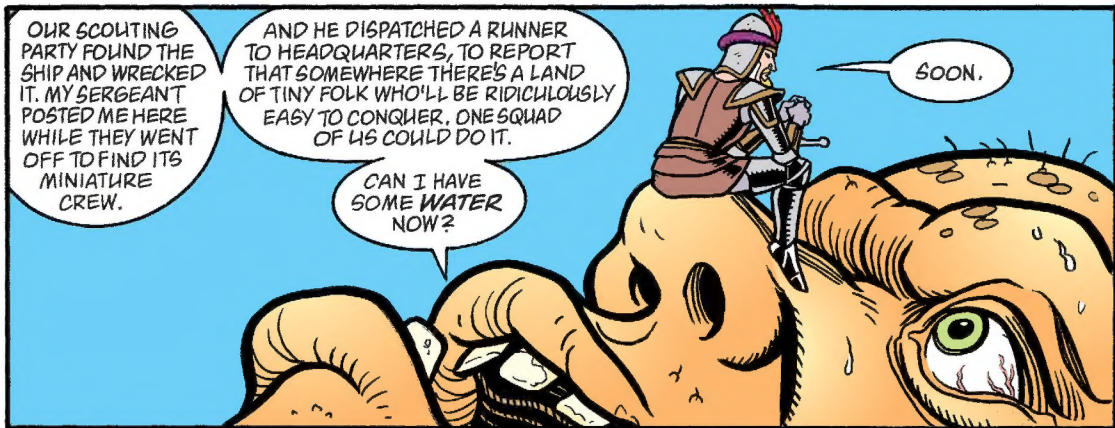
CAPTURE THAT ENEMY SOLDIER, CAPTAIN. I WANT TO QUESTION HIM.



FINALLY AWAKE? GOOD.

NOW WE CAN TALK.

"COLONEL WUDDERSHANKS QUESTIONED THEIR CAPTIVE FOR HOURS."



OUR SCOUTING PARTY FOUND THE SHIP AND WRECKED IT. MY SERGEANT POSTED ME HERE WHILE THEY WENT OFF TO FIND ITS MINIATURE CREW.

AND HE DISPATCHED A RUNNER TO HEADQUARTERS, TO REPORT THAT SOMEWHERE THERE'S A LAND OF TINY FOLK WHO'LL BE RIDICULOUSLY EASY TO CONQUER. ONE SQUAD OF US COULD DO IT.

CAN I HAVE SOME WATER NOW?

SOON.



"AND MORE HOURS!"

WE CAN'T GO HOME AND WE CAN'T STAY HERE. THE OTHER GOBLINS WILL BE BACK SOONER OR LATER.

THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO FIND SOMEWHERE ELSE TO GO.

MUSTER THE TROOPS, CAPTAIN.



"AND SO THE LILLIPIUTIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE BECAME A BAND OF WANDERING REFUGEES, JUST ONE MORE SUCH GROUP IN A STRANGE, GIANT WORLD."

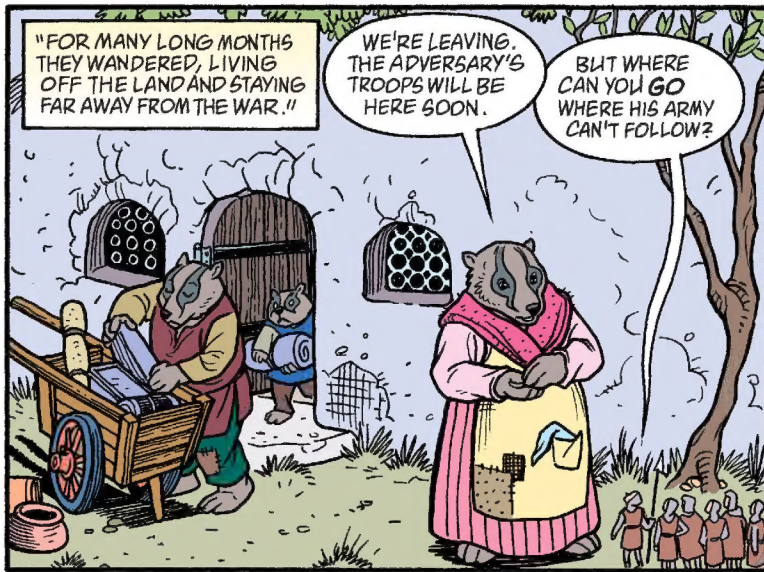
YEARS AT LEAST.

HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT'LL BE BEFORE WE SEE OUR HOME AGAIN?

MAYBE NEVER. EVEN IF WE HAD A SHIP, WE COULDN'T GO HOME NOW.

WE'D ONLY RISK LEADING THESE MONSTERS BACK THERE IF WE DID.





"FOR MANY LONG MONTHS THEY WANDERED, LIVING OFF THE LAND AND STAYING FAR AWAY FROM THE WAR."

"WE'RE LEAVING. THE ADVERSARY'S TROOPS WILL BE HERE SOON."

"BUT WHERE CAN YOU GO WHERE HIS ARMY CAN'T FOLLOW?"



"WE'VE HEARD OF A GATEWAY TO A MAGICAL NEW WORLD. A PLACE OF SANCTUARY."

"TELL YOUR COLONEL HE'S WELCOME TO COME WITH US, BUT DON'T DAWDLE. WE'RE GOING TODAY."

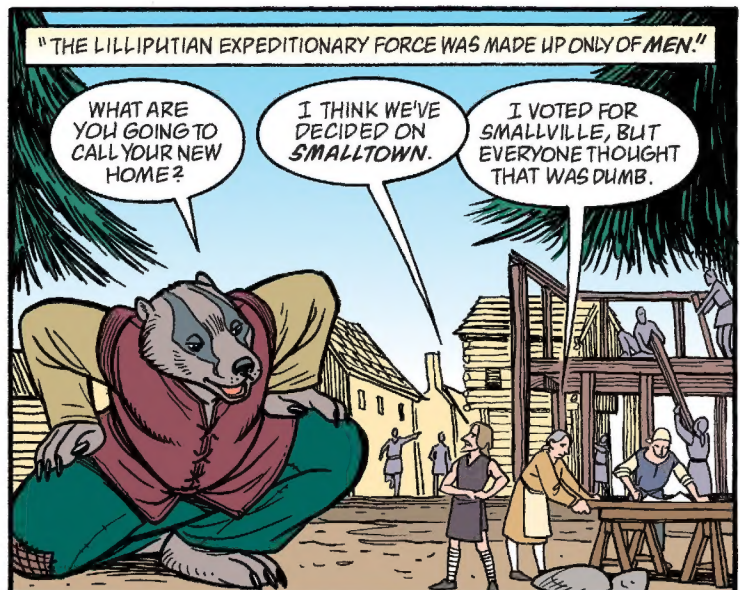


"AND DAWDLE THEY DIDN'T. THEY JOINED ONE OF THE MANY FABLE GROUPS MAKING THEIR WAY TO THE NEW WORLD."



"AND THAT'S HOW THEY CAME HERE AND FOUNDED SMALLTOWN, UP AT THE FARM?"

"YEAH, BUT THERE WAS ONE BIG PROBLEM THAT BECAME ALMOST IMMEDIATELY APPARENT."

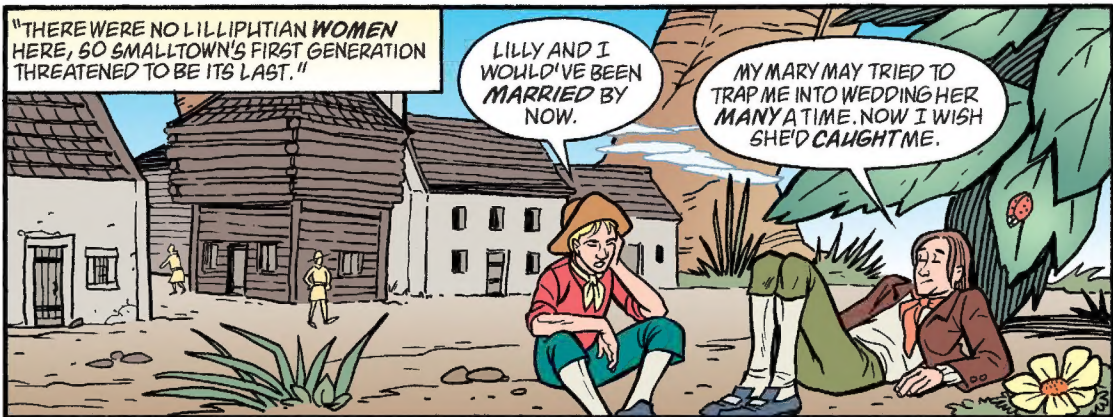


"THE LILLIPIPTIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE WAS MADE UP ONLY OF MEN."

"WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO CALL YOUR NEW HOME?"

"I THINK WE'VE DECIDED ON SMALLTOWN."

"I VOTED FOR SMALLVILLE, BUT EVERYONE THOUGHT THAT WAS DUMB."



"THERE WERE NO LILLIPLUTIAN WOMEN HERE, SO SMALLTOWN'S FIRST GENERATION THREATENED TO BE ITS LAST."

LILLY AND I WOULD'VE BEEN MARRIED BY NOW.

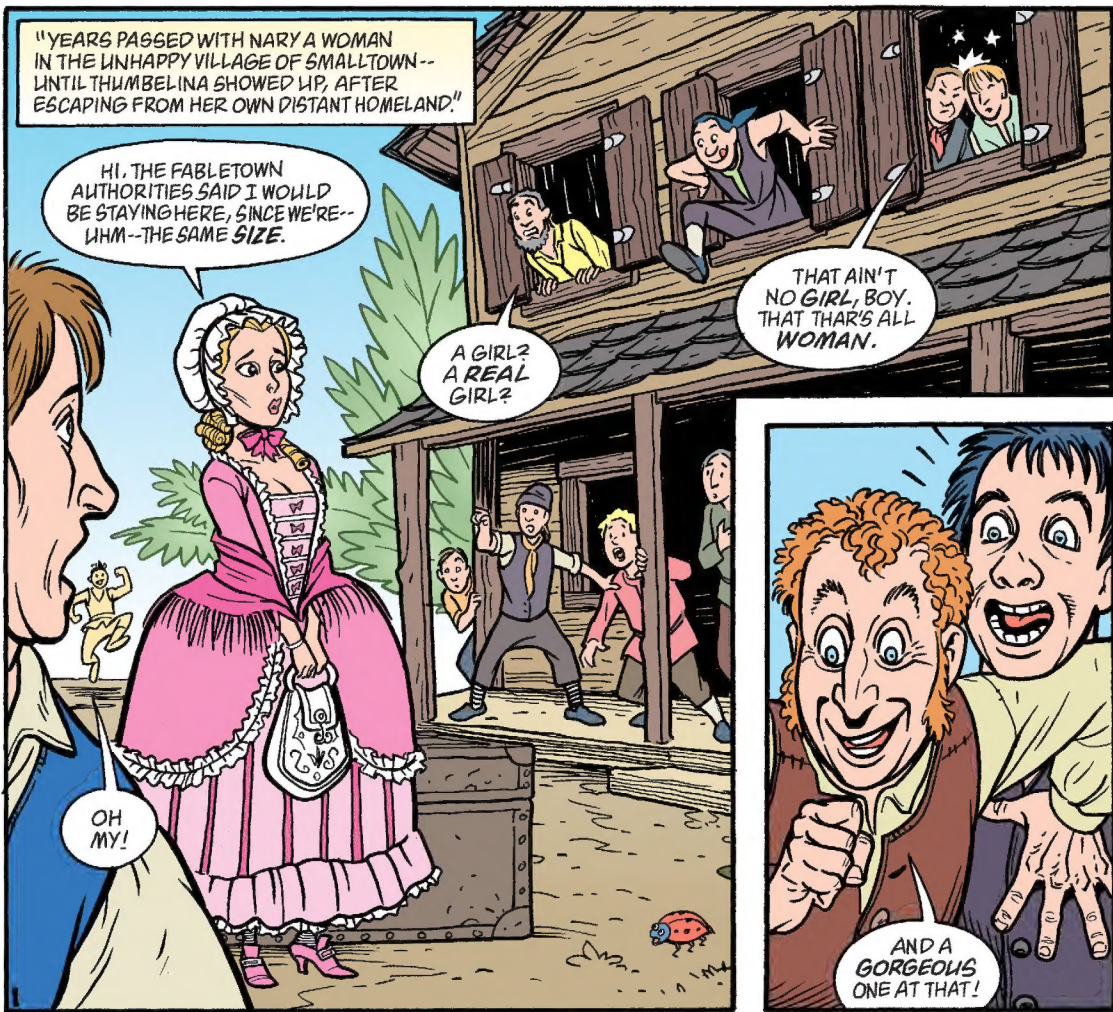
MY MARY MAY TRIED TO TRAP ME INTO WEDDING HER MANY A TIME. NOW I WISH SHE'D CAUGHT ME.



BUT THERE ARE WOMEN UP IN SMALLTOWN, BIGBY. LOTS OF THEM. I'VE SEEN THEM.

WHO'S TELLING THIS STORY, FLY? YOU OR ME?

SORRY. PLEASE CONTINUE.



"YEARS PASSED WITH NARY A WOMAN IN THE UNHAPPY VILLAGE OF SMALLTOWN-- UNTIL THUMBELINA SHOWED UP, AFTER ESCAPING FROM HER OWN DISTANT HOMETLAND."

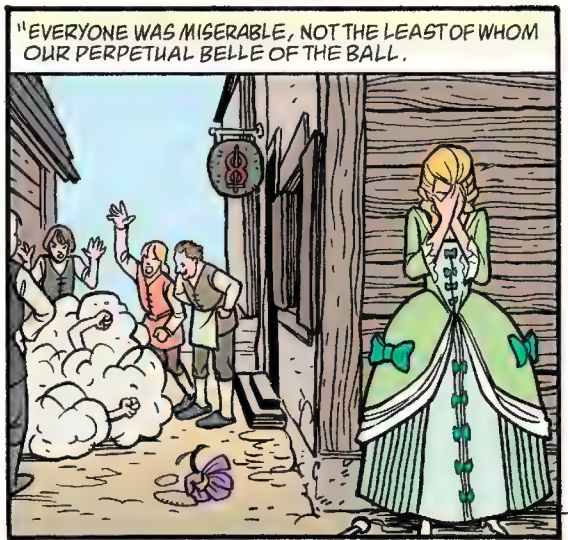
HI. THE FABLETOWN AUTHORITIES SAID I WOULD BE STAYING HERE, SINCE WE'RE-- UHM--THE SAME SIZE.

A GIRL? A REAL GIRL?

THAT AIN'T NO GIRL, BOY. THAT THAR'S ALL WOMAN.

OH MY!

AND A GORGEOUS ONE AT THAT!



"THE EVENTUAL SOLUTION TO THEIR DILEMMA CAME FROM AN UNEXPECTED CORNER."

SO MY MOTHER-TO-BE PLANTED THAT KERNEL OF BARLEYCORN IN A FLOWER POT.

"BY THEN, EVERYONE KNEW THUMBELINA'S STORY-- HOW SHE CAME INTO THE WORLD."

AND A TULIP GREW OUT OF IT AND I SPRANG OUT OF THE TULIP BLOSSOM.

"NOW THAT SAME VERY GOOD WITCH-- WHO GAVE THE BARLEYCORN TO THE WOMAN TO GROW HERSELF A DAUGHTER-- HAD ESCAPED THE ADVERSARY AND WAS EVEN THEN LIVING IN FABLETOWN!"

OH YES, GAFFER WOLF, I HAD ME A WHOLE JAR FULL OF THEM MAGIC BARLEYCORNS-- FULL TO THE TOP.

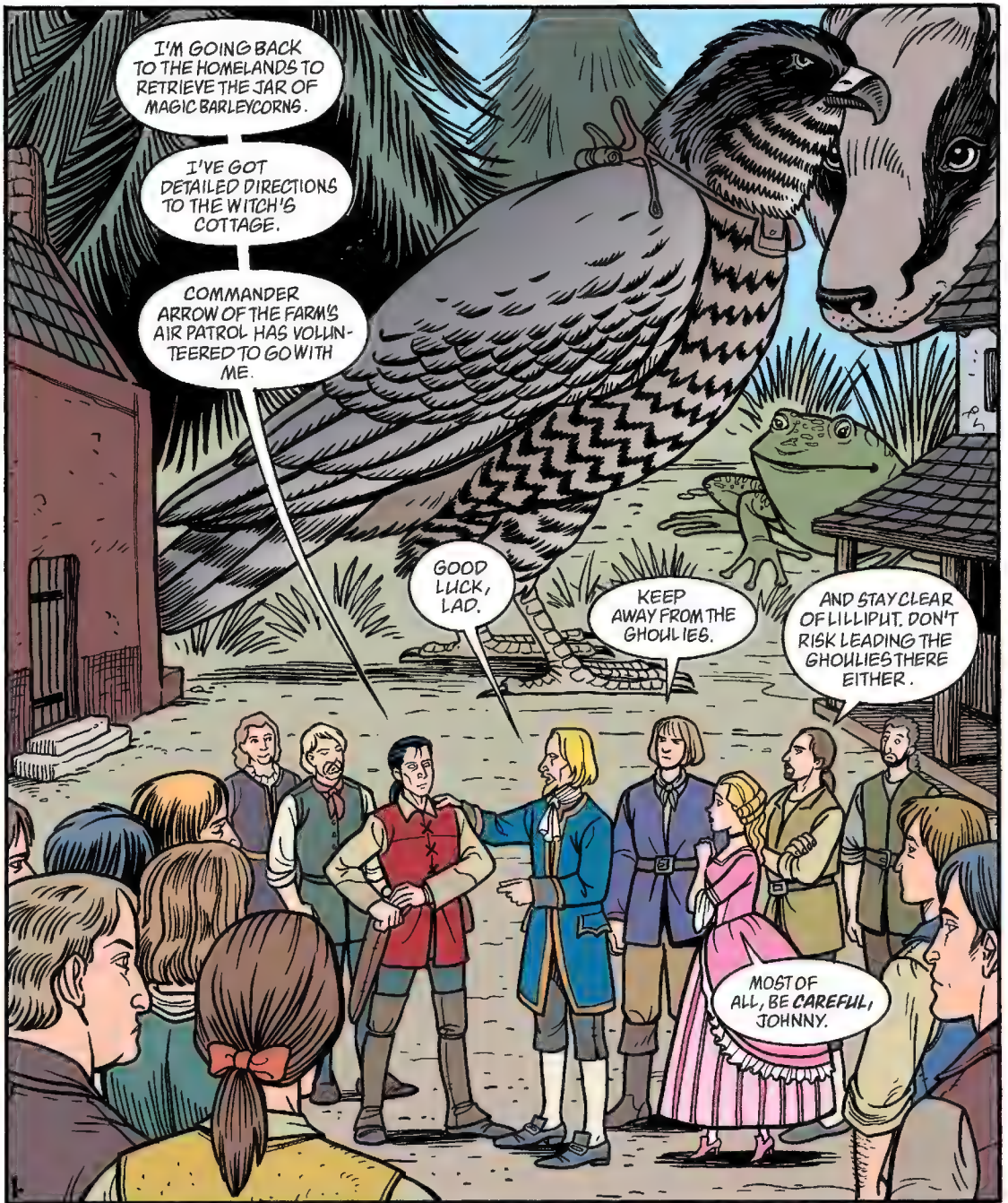
BUT I DIDN'T ESCAPE WITH THEM. I HAD TOO MUCH TO CARRY AS IT WAS.

I IMAGINE THAT JAR MIGHT STILL BE THERE, BACK IN MY OLD COTTAGE.

"WORD GOT AROUND--WHICH IT WILL--AND PRETTY SOON REACHED BACK UP TO THE FARM, TO THE EARS OF SMALLTOWN'S JOHNNY BULLHORN, A BOLD YOUNG FELLOW FULL OF SPIT AND PEPPER."

I'VE GOT AN IDEA.

WHAT'S THAT, JOHNNY?



I'M GOING BACK TO THE HOMELANDS TO RETRIEVE THE JAR OF MAGIC BARLEYCORN'S.

I'VE GOT DETAILED DIRECTIONS TO THE WITCH'S COTTAGE.

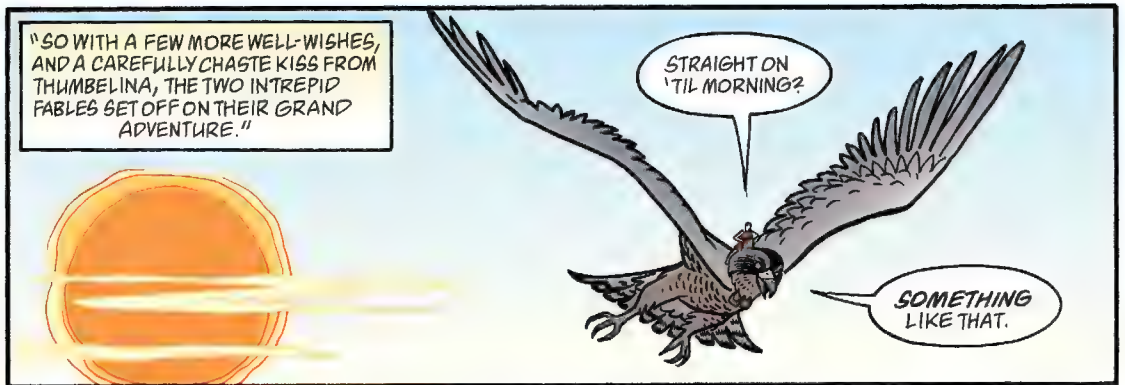
COMMANDER ARROW OF THE FARM'S AIR PATROL HAS VOLUNTEERED TO GO WITH ME.

GOOD LUCK, LAD.

KEEP AWAY FROM THE GHOULIES.

AND STAY CLEAR OF LILLIPUT. DON'T RISK LEADING THE GHOULIES THERE EITHER.

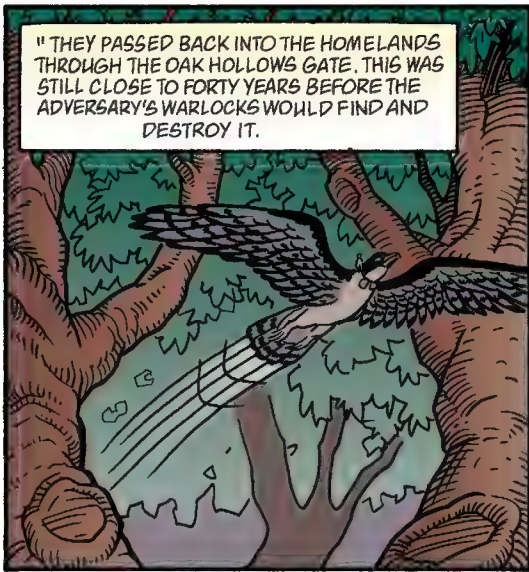
MOST OF ALL, BE CAREFUL, JOHNNY.



"SO WITH A FEW MORE WELL-WISHES, AND A CAREFULLY CHASTE KISS FROM THUMBELINA, THE TWO INTREPID FABLES SET OFF ON THEIR GRAND ADVENTURE."

STRAIGHT ON 'TIL MORNING?

SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

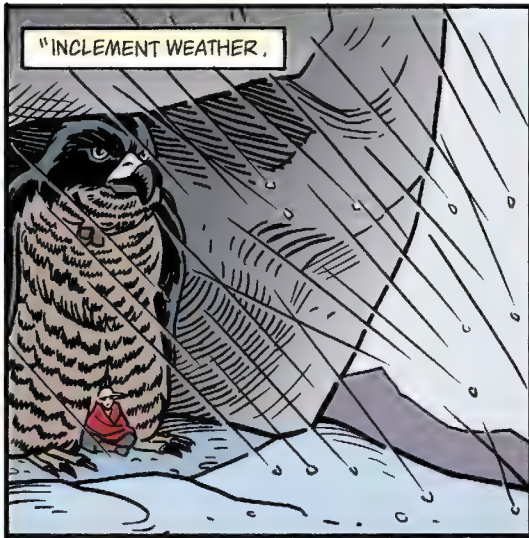


"THEY PASSED BACK INTO THE HOMELANDS THROUGH THE OAK HOLLOW'S GATE. THIS WAS STILL CLOSE TO FORTY YEARS BEFORE THE ADVERSARY'S WARLOCKS WOULD FIND AND DESTROY IT.



"AND, TRUE TO THEIR WISH, THEY ENJOYED ADVENTURES APLENTY.

"NARROW ESCAPES.



"INCLEMENT WEATHER.



"AND COUNTLESS OTHER HARDSHIPS."

YOU'LL HARDLY MAKE A MOUTHFUL.

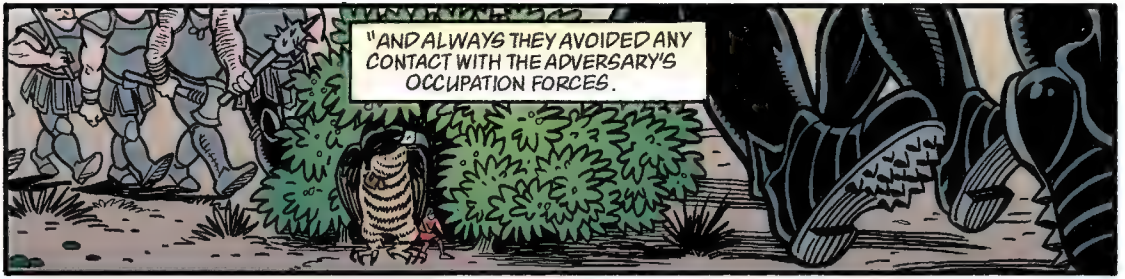
COME ANY CLOSER AND YOU'LL NIBBLE ON AN INCH OF GOOD MILDENDAN STEEL.



WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?

A GUEST TO SHARE OUR LUNCH, BUT HE COULDN'T STAY.

BAH! HE WAS TOO SMALL TO BE RIPE YET ANYWAY.



"AND ALWAYS THEY AVOIDED ANY CONTACT WITH THE ADVERSARY'S OCCUPATION FORCES."

"A FEW MONTHS PASSED, BUT NO ONE WORRIED MUCH. DISTANCES WERE GREATER IN THOSE DAYS."



I WONDER WHERE JOHNNY IS TODAY.

LIVING IN LUXURY IN SOME REMOTE FAIRY CASTLE, I'LL BET. BE-TROTHED TO AN ELF-KING'S HAUNTINGLY BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER.

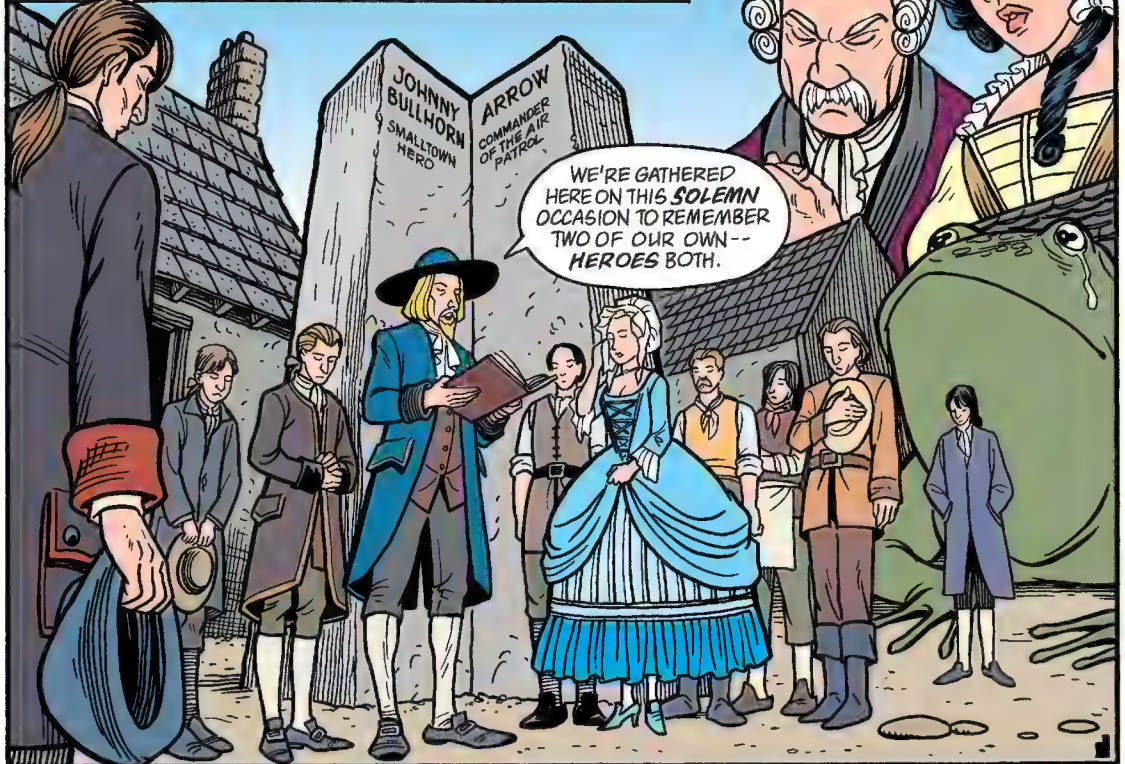
"WHEN IT GREW TO SIX MONTHS, WE BEGAN TO FRET A BIT!"



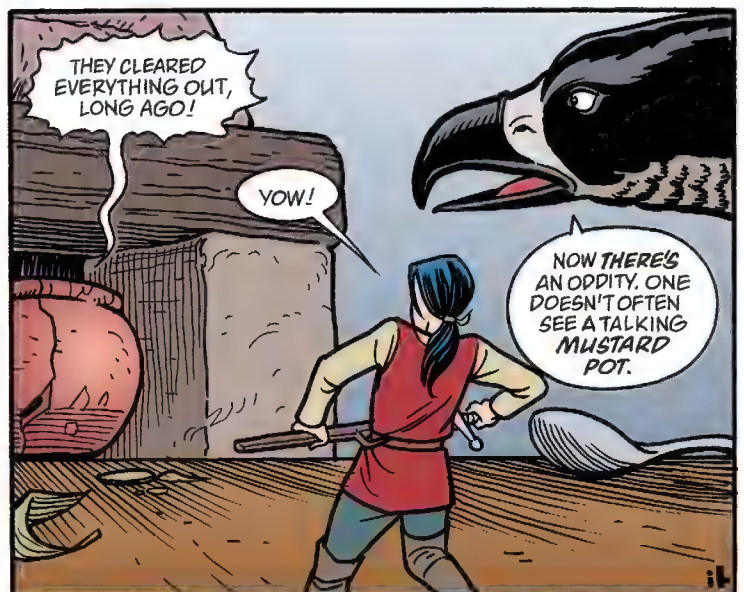
HEARD ANYTHING YET, MISS WHITE?

FROM THE FARM? NO, NOTHING YET, MISTER WOLF.

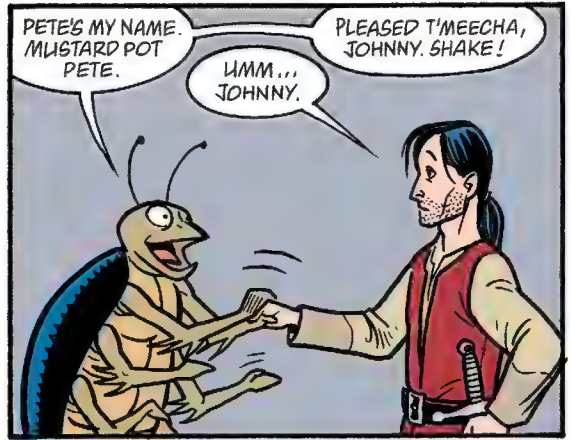
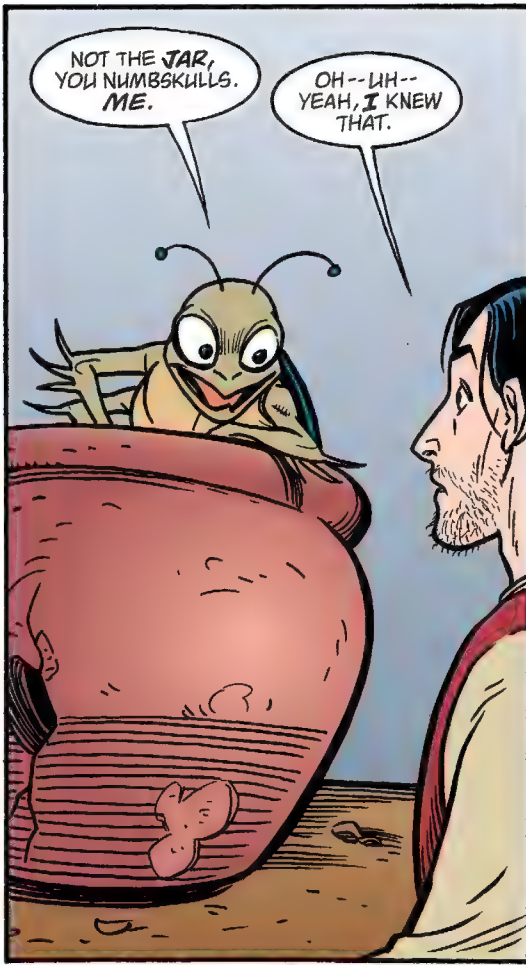
"AND THEN, WHEN A YEAR PASSED, FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER, WE HELD A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THE TWO OF THEM. IT WAS UP AT THE FARM, SO I WASN'T ABLE TO ATTEND."



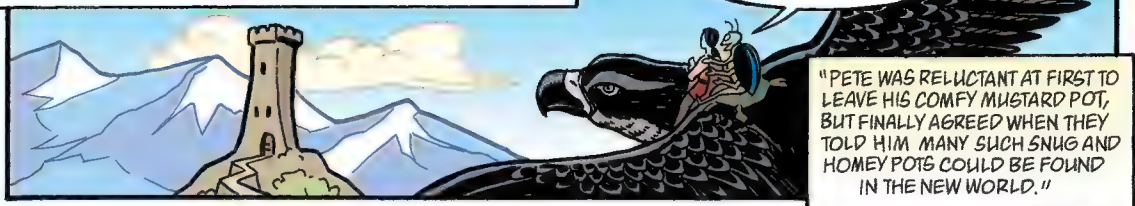
WE'RE GATHERED HERE ON THIS SOLEMN OCCASION TO REMEMBER TWO OF OUR OWN -- HEROES BOTH.







"LONG STORY SHORT-- JOHNNY AND ARROW INVITED PETE TO COME WITH THEM TO GET THE BARLEYCORN, AND THEN RETURN WITH THEM TO THE FARM."



THERE IT IS, FELLERS!  
JUST LIKE I TOLDJA!

"PETE WAS RELUCTANT AT FIRST TO LEAVE HIS COMFY MUSTARD POT, BUT FINALLY AGREED WHEN THEY TOLD HIM MANY SUCH SNUG AND HOMEY POTS COULD BE FOUND IN THE NEW WORLD."



WOO HOO! I'M GOING TO PICK OUT SOMETHING TO TAKE BACK WITH ME, TOO!

SHHHHH!  
THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE A COVERT OPERATION.

WHADDAZ THAT MEAN?

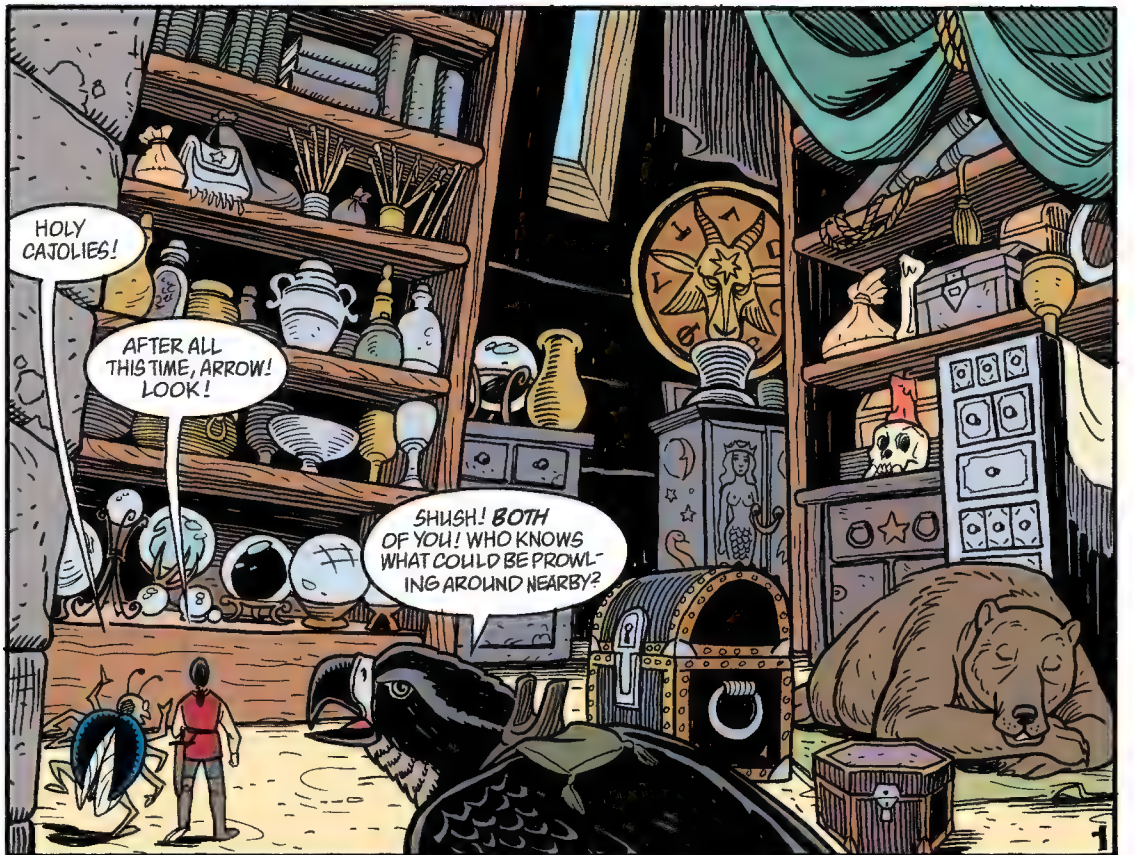
BE SNEAKY.



I WONDER WHAT KIND OF FELL BEASTIE THEY HAVE GUARDING THIS PLACE?

THERE'S A GUARD MONSTER?

DIDN'T I MENTION THAT PART?

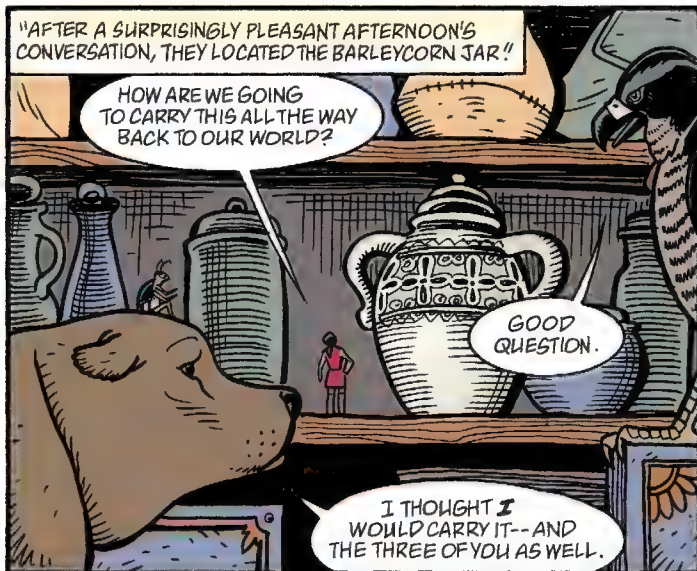


HOLY CATOLIES!

AFTER ALL THIS TIME, ARROW! LOOK!

SHUSH! BOTH OF YOU! WHO KNOWS WHAT COULD BE PROWLING AROUND NEARBY?





"AFTER A SURPRISINGLY PLEASANT AFTERNOON'S CONVERSATION, THEY LOCATED THE BARLEYCORN JAR!!"

HOW ARE WE GOING TO CARRY THIS ALL THE WAY BACK TO OUR WORLD?

GOOD QUESTION.

I THOUGHT I WOULD CARRY IT-- AND THE THREE OF YOU AS WELL.



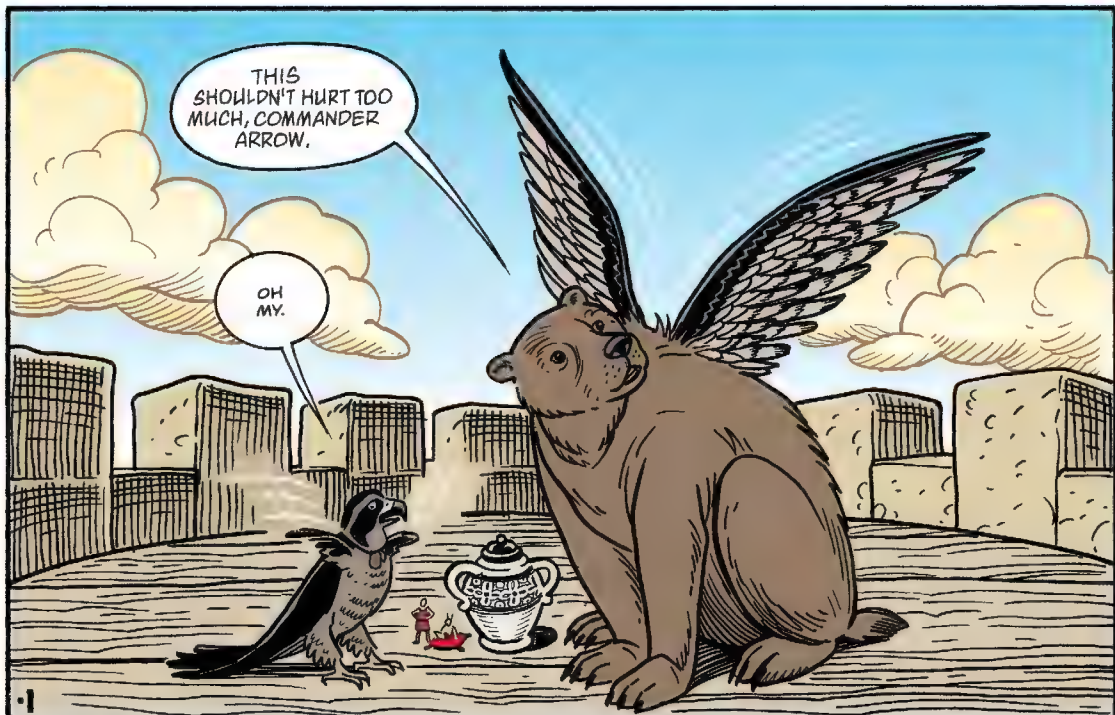
YOU'RE COMING WITH US?

IF COMMANDER ARROW COULD BE PERSUADED TO LEND ME HIS WINGS FOR A FEW DAYS.



I HAD NO STRONG DESIRE TO SERVE THE INVADERS, BUT AT LEAST IN THIS JOB THEY LEAVE ME ALONE FOR THE MOST PART.

AND, UNTIL NOW, I HAD NOWHERE ELSE TO GO. I THOUGHT THEY'D ALREADY CONQUERED EVERY LAND.



THIS SHOULDN'T HURT TOO MUCH, COMMANDER ARROW.

OH MY.



"BY NOW, YOU'VE FIGURED OUT THE REST OF THIS TALE."

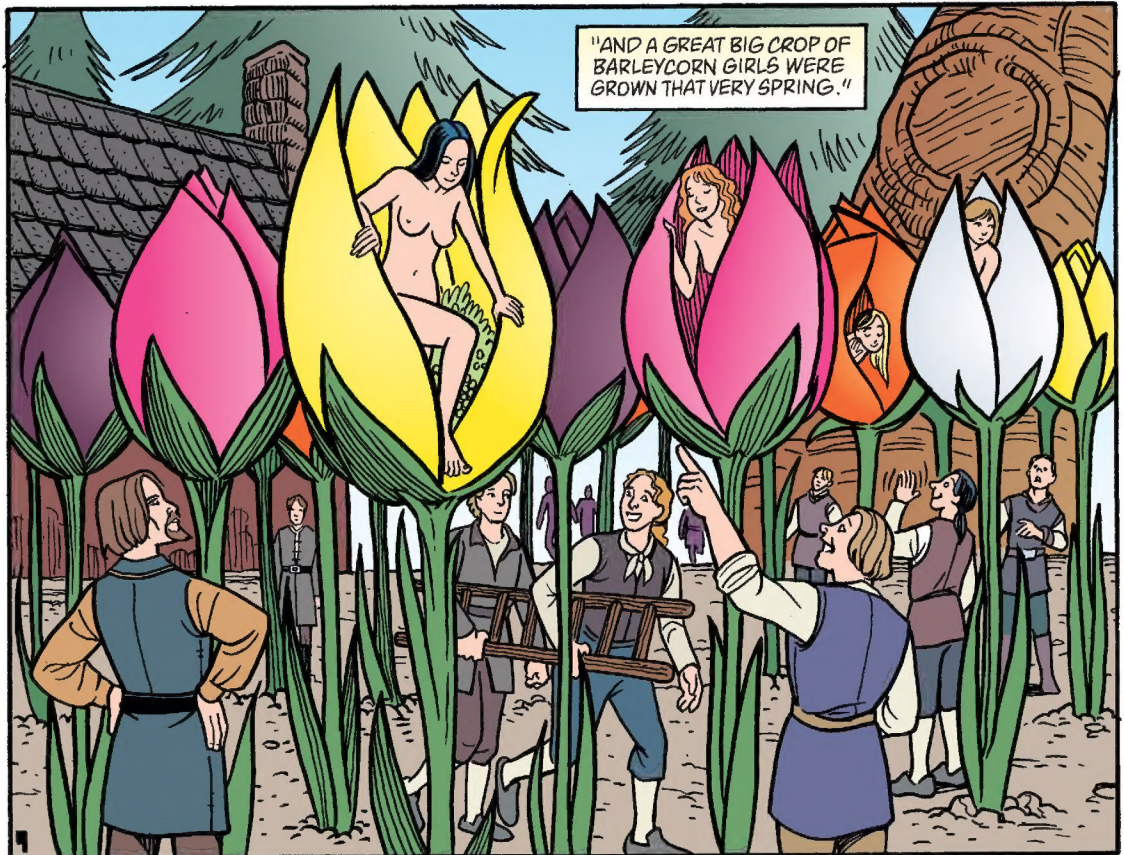
"JOHNNY AND ARROW FLEW HOME, BRINGING THEIR NEW FRIENDS WITH THEM."



"THEY WERE WARMLY GREETED ON THEIR RETURN!!"

WELCOME HOME, JOHNNY!

MUSTARD POT PETE'S THE NAME! PLEASED T'MEECHA!



"AND A GREAT BIG CROP OF BARLEYCORN GIRLS WERE GROWN THAT VERY SPRING."

"FIVE COUPLES WERE UNITED  
IN THAT FIRST OF MANY WEDDINGS  
TO COME."



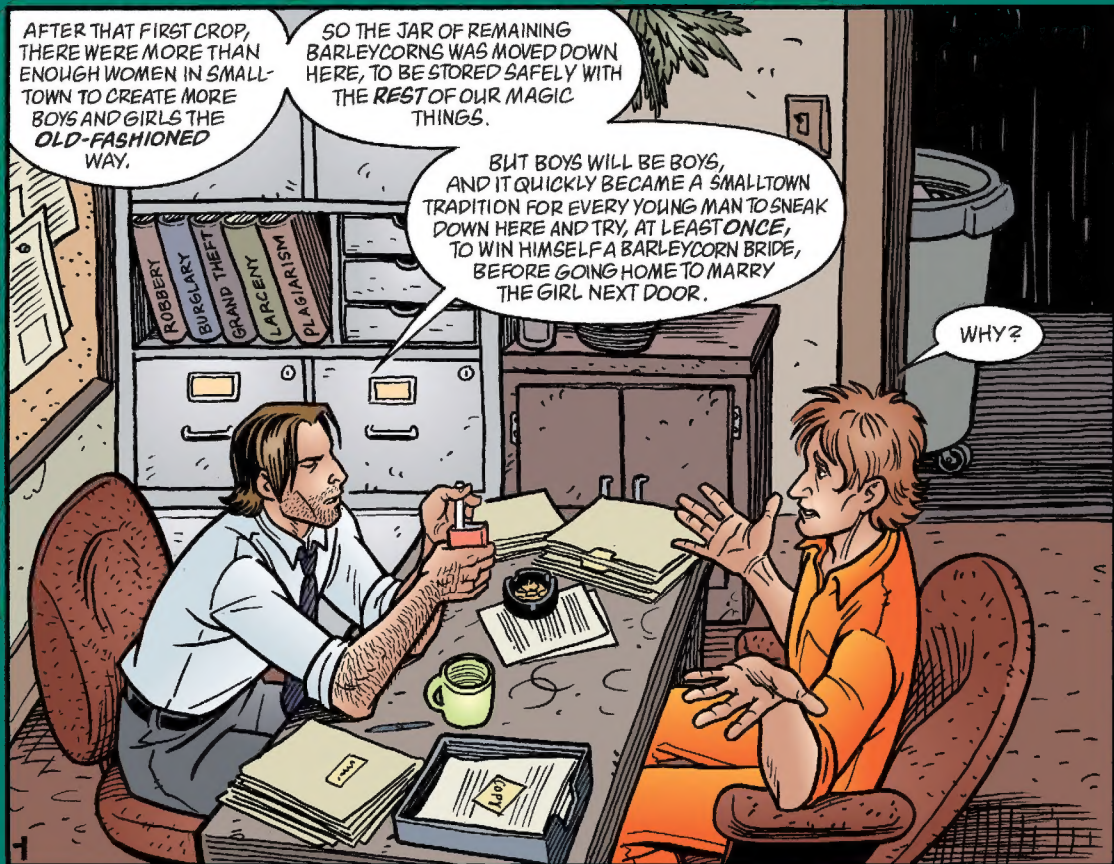
"THE MAGIC BEAR GAVE ARROW HIS WINGS  
BACK AND LIVED ON THE FARM FOR A FEW  
CENTURIES, BEFORE GETTING A HANKERING TO  
LIVE DOWN IN THE CITY."

"HE TRANSFORMED HIMSELF INTO MISTER  
GRANDOURS, WHO LIVES UP ON THE  
NINTH FLOOR."

"PETE FOUND HIMSELF  
ANOTHER COZY, DISCARDED  
MUSTARD POT TO MOVE INTO."

"AND YOUNG JOHNNY  
BULLHORN WAS KNOWN  
FROM THAT DAY FORWARD  
AS JOHN BARLEYCORN."

"HE HAD MANY OTHER ADVENTURES,  
WHICH ARE TALES FOR ANOTHER  
TIME."



AFTER THAT FIRST CROP, THERE WERE MORE THAN ENOUGH WOMEN IN SMALL-TOWN TO CREATE MORE BOYS AND GIRLS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY.

SO THE JAR OF REMAINING BARLEYCORN WAS MOVED DOWN HERE, TO BE STORED SAFELY WITH THE REST OF OUR MAGIC THINGS.

BUT BOYS WILL BE BOYS, AND IT QUICKLY BECAME A SMALLTOWN TRADITION FOR EVERY YOUNG MAN TO SNEAK DOWN HERE AND TRY, AT LEAST ONCE, TO WIN HIMSELF A BARLEYCORN BRIDE, BEFORE GOING HOME TO MARRY THE GIRL NEXT DOOR.

WHY?



MANY REASONS, I GUESS. A DESIRE TO WIN STATUS IN THE COMMUNITY BY IMITATING WHAT JOHN BARLEYCORN DID.

AND THE BARLEYCORNS ARE REPUTED TO BE FAR LOVELIER THAN ANY NORMAL GIRL--THEIR SIZE OR OURS.

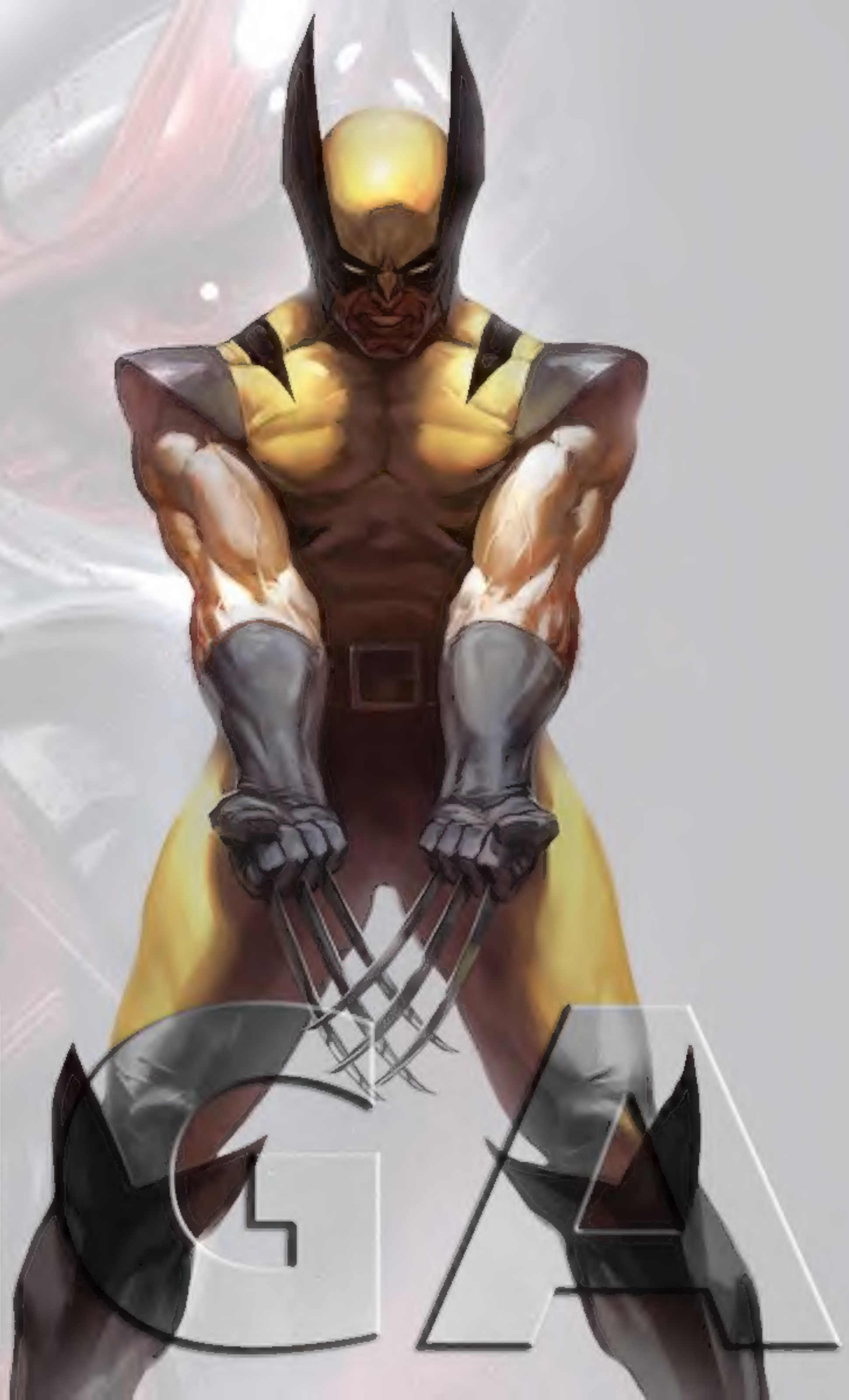
OKAY, FLY, YOU'VE HAD YOUR STORY. WE BOTH HAVE THINGS TO DO.



THANKS, SHERIFF. YOU KNOW, YOU'RE NOT NEARLY AS MEAN AS EVERYONE SAYS YOU... UH--I'LL GET BACK TO WORK NOW.

TO BE CONTINUED

NEXT: MARK BUCKINGHAM & STEVE LEIALOHA RETURN IN A STORYLINE THAT STARS A MYSTERIOUS **WOMAN IN RED!**



NATHAN